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HOW LONG WILL THE WAR LAST?

CURRENT OPINION

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DID ABRAHAM LINCOLN BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY?

SOON after the death of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, one of his biographers put forward the claim that he was a devout believer in Christianity. The claim was promptly denied by Lincoln's friends, and a controversy began which has continued until this day. Last winter, ex-Governor Dunne, of Illinois, made the statement, in an address before a Roman Catholic Club in Buffalo, that "Lincoln was not a Christian, but was probably a deist and a disbeliever in miracles, revelation, the atonement, etc." This statement, tho challenged in several religious papers, is supported by the testimony of Lincoln's closest associates, including the three men—John T. Stuart, Stephen T. Logan and William H. Herndon—who at various times were his law-partners. Herndon asserted Lincoln's heresies most emphatically in the "Abbott Letter" of 1870, so called because addressed to the *Index*, a paper published in Toledo, Ohio, and edited by Francis E. Abbott. Mr. Herndon wrote:

"From what I knew of Mr. Lincoln, and from what I heard and verily believe, I can say, first, he did not believe in a special-creation, his idea being that all creation was an evolution under law; secondly, he did not believe that the Bible was a special revelation from God, as the Christian world contends; thirdly, he did not believe in miracles as understood by Christians; fourthly, he believed in universal inspiration and miracles under law; fifthly, he did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, as the Christian church contends; sixthly, he believed that all things, both matter and mind, were governed by laws, universal, absolute and eternal."

All this was challenged in a lecture on "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln" written by the Rev. James A. Reed, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Illinois, and published in *Scribner's Monthly* in July, 1873. Mr. Reed's contention was that while Lincoln may have been an "Infidel" when a young man, he changed

his views as he grew older. The lecture, with Herndon's rebuttal, has been lately published, in a private edition, by Judd Stewart, of Plainfield, New Jersey. He states that the Herndon rejoinder was in danger of being forgotten until he discovered and republished it, and he offers the following comment on the debate: "No one can read these documents and fail to be convinced that Abraham Lincoln had an abiding faith in God, that he was deeply religious, that he had great charity and gentleness of soul, but there is nothing in this record to justify the claims of those who would prove him an orthodox Christian."

Evidence tending to show that Lincoln was not so radical in his religious beliefs as Herndon and others have claimed is furnished by Henry B. Rankin in his recent "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln" (Putnam). Mr. Rankin was for several years a student in the Lincoln and Herndon Law Office in Springfield, Illinois, and he tries to show that "the

charge of infidelity was originated and circulated by Lincoln's political foes." A great deal has been made by Herndon and others of a Freethought manuscript which Lincoln is declared to have written and which was supposedly snatched from his hands by an indignant storekeeper and thrust into a stove. Mr. Rankin concedes that papers were burned, but maintains that they were partly of a business and partly of a personal character. In the Rankin home Lincoln met Ann Rutledge, and it was widely believed that the shock caused by her death was responsible for his religious skepticism. When questioned by Rankin's mother on this subject, Lincoln is reported to have said:

"Those days of trouble found me tossed amidst a sea of questionings. They piled big upon me experiences that brought with them great strains upon my emotional and mental life. Through all I groped my way until I found a stronger and higher grasp of thought, one that reached beyond this life with a clearness and satisfaction that I had never known before. The Scriptures unfolded before me with a deeper and more logical appeal through these new experiences than anything else I could find to turn to or ever before had found in them. . . . I doubt the possibility or propriety of settling the religion of Jesus Christ in the models of man-made creeds and dogmas. It was a spirit in the life that he laid stress on and taught, if I read aright. I know I see it to be so with me.

"The fundamental truths reported in the four gospels as from the lips of Jesus Christ, and that I first heard from the lips of my mother, are settled and fixed moral precepts with me. I have concluded to dismiss from my mind the debatable wrangles that once perplexed me with distractions that stirred up but never absolutely settled everything. I have tossed them aside with the doubtful differences that divide denominations. . . . I cannot without mental reservations assent to long and complicated creeds and catechisms. If the church would ask simply for assent to the Saviour's statement of the substance of the law, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and thy



AN ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPH OF LINCOLN
For which he sat to Brady, the Washington photographer, when President.

neighbor as thyself—that church would I gladly unite with.”

The entire question of Lincoln's religious faith has lately led to an interesting discussion in the *New York Times*. One participant, W. M. van der Weyde, President of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association, insists that the evidence is overwhelming that “Lincoln was not a believer in Christianity, but was, to the contrary, a disbeliever—an Agnostic or Infidel.” He cites the statement of Herndon that “Mr. Lincoln was an Infidel and so died,” and continues:

“Colonel Ward H. Lamon, author of an important ‘Life of Lincoln,’ who was the warm friend and confidant of Lincoln and accompanied the newly elected President from Springfield to Washington, remaining in that city with him until his death, when he led the great funeral

procession in the capital and then accompanied the great man's body to its final resting-place in Springfield, wrote the following paragraph:

“When he [Lincoln] came to New Salem he consorted with Freethinkers, joined with them in deriding the gospel history of Jesus, read Voltaire and Paine, and then wrote a deliberate and labored essay wherein he reached conclusions similar to theirs. The essay was burned, but he never denied or regretted its composition” (Life of Lincoln, page 487).

“John G. Nicolay, private secretary to Lincoln in Washington and one of the martyr President's closest friends and also his biographer, wrote in a letter to Mr. Herndon: ‘Mr. Lincoln did not, to my knowledge, change his religious ideas, opinions or beliefs from the time he left Springfield to the day of his death.’

“John E. Remsburg's ‘Abraham Lincoln: Was He a Christian?’ (New York, 1893) goes into the subject of Lincoln's

religion very exhaustively. Mr. Remsburg proves conclusively by a large array of witnesses gathered from Lincoln's most intimate friends that Lincoln was not a believer in nor a supporter of the system of Christianity. The same writer produces further evidence in his work entitled ‘Six Historic Americans’ (Truth Seeker Company, New York).”

Another correspondent of the *Times*, Thomas Mayo Roberts, takes the view that Lincoln was not an Infidel in the strict sense of the term. “To-day we would call him liberal, and in another generation, it may be a hundred years hence, he will be rightly placed in the list of great liberal-minded Christians. Lincoln is a magnificent historical example of one who was a Christian in every essential respect, without subscribing to any church ritual as a member.”

HERBERT SPENCER AS A FALLEN IDOL

A CONTROVERSY recently raged in England regarding Spencer's theory of the State and its relation to the present war. It was occasioned by the publication of a biography of Spencer, written by Hugh Elliott. Havelock Ellis argued from an individualistic point of view; Bernard Shaw took a Socialistic attitude; while Mr. Elliott upheld the view that “if Europe had followed Spencer this war could never have occurred.” The discussion reached no definite conclusion, but is illustrative of a disposition on the part of contemporary thinkers to make a new appraisal of Spencer's intellectual standing. While Havelock Ellis talks of Spencer's “triumph,” Basil Williams, the author of the series of “Makers of the Nineteenth Century” in which the Elliott biography appears, sees Spencer's influence declining. He speaks of “Spencer's already almost neglected tenets,” and adds that, “as far as one can see, whether as a philosopher or a man of science, Spencer is not likely to live for future generations.”

In an article lately published in *The Catholic World* (New York), Dr. James J. Walsh calls Spencer a fallen idol. “Herbert Spencer,” he says, “was a name to conjure with twenty-five years ago in certain scientific and cultural circles. But how are the mighty fallen! How little interest is shown in Herbert Spencer at the present time!”

“A generation ago he was quoted confidently, and by many his opinion on a question was accepted as final. Occasionally a man now far beyond middle life still quotes him, but the quotation is

received with a shrug of the shoulders and a conviction that an old fogey is speaking, one whose intellectual life ended during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For we of the twentieth century have other divinities to worship, tho in philosophic circles I venture to doubt if any of them exercise the influence that Herbert Spencer did in the nineties.”

Dr. Walsh finds much, even as a Roman Catholic, to admire in Spencer's writings; but he thinks that what is sound in his doctrines represents a falling away from his earlier views. He speaks, for instance, of the way in which Spencer lost faith in the education of the intellect. At the end of his life, Spencer confessed that he had overvalued, in certain respects, the power of knowledge. In his essay on “Feeling versus Intellect” in “Facts and Comments,” he wrote: “Everywhere the cry is—educate, educate, educate! Everywhere the belief is that by such culture as schools furnish, children, and therefore adults, can be molded into the desired shapes. It is assumed that when men are taught what is right, they will do what is right—that a proposition intellectually accepted will be morally operative. And yet this conviction, contradicted by every-day experience, is at variance with an every-day axiom—the axiom that each faculty is strengthened by exercise of it—intellectual power by intellectual action, and moral power by moral action.” In the same essay, Spencer declared: “The emotions are the masters, the intellect the servant, so that little can be done by improving the servant while the masters remain

unimproved. Improving the servant does but give the masters more power of achieving their end.” On all of which Dr. Walsh comments:

“Cardinal Newman said that one might as well try to hold huge ships with silken threads or quarry marble with razors as expect that the intellect would do the rude work of repressing human passions when they are really aroused. Spencer and Newman might perhaps not be expected often to agree on ethical subjects, and yet here at least they were in excellent accord.”

That Spencer abandoned his aggressive Agnosticism as he grew older, is well known. He said: “Sympathy commands silence towards all those who, suffering under the ills of life, derive comfort from their creed.” Perhaps the reversal of opinion on the part of Spencer most disturbing for his disciples was that expressed in the last chapter of “Facts and Comments.” In it he wrote: “Could we penetrate the mysteries of existence there would remain still more transcendent mysteries.” Space eternal, self-existent, uncreated, infinite in duration and extension, assumptions required by Spencer's previous mode of thinking, now seemed to him staggering. The last sentence of his book was: “Of late years the consciousness that without origin or cause infinite space has ever existed and must ever exist produces in me a feeling from which I shrink.”

Dr. Walsh finds Spencer's philosophy superficial and unsatisfactory. He sums up his argument:

“What is perhaps most amusing with regard to Herbert Spencer, considering the interest of scientists in his work, sci-

entists who were quite sure that the only way to get at truth was by inductive reasoning, that is by gathering together a number of instances and then finding the law in them, was the fact that Spencer's philosophy was entirely one of deduction. His mind lit upon some principle and then he proceeded to find facts that

would support it and illustrate it. He had a marvelous memory for instances that would confirm his notions, but paid no attention at all to anything that disagreed with his preconceived ideas. Nothing illustrates better the place of deduction in any system of philosophy than Spencer's devotion to it, tho he appeared

to be so intent on modern science and the accumulation of instances that a great many of his disciples were quite sure that he was writing an inductive philosophy. Even the great accumulation of facts in his 'Sociology' had no influence except to confirm certain principles already outlined in Spencer's mind."

HOPING FOR A REVIVAL OF PAGANISM

EVEN as the guns thunder and the nations go out to slaughter, Edward Lewis, a writer in the *Atlantic*, finds time to indulge in a poetic reverie on "The New Paganism" and to express the hope of those who look for a revival of Paganism, sooner or later, in the modern world. Mr. Lewis recalls that, some years ago, there appeared in England a single number of a magazine styled *The New Pagan Review*. It was edited by William Sharp, whose writings under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod had had considerable vogue. But it was unsuccessful, and, in Mr. Lewis' estimation, its lack of success was in large part due to its name. "For to give a name to a thing is often to damn it. A label is a distinguishing mark which not seldom has an extinguishing effect." Mr. Lewis goes on to illustrate the point:

"The Germans were rapidly conquering the world by a process of 'peaceful penetration,' but in a fatal hour they inscribed 'Pan-Germanism' upon a banner, hoisted it over a park of heavy artillery for all the world to see, and the world—saw it! William Sharp may have thought that it was the Neo-Pagan element in his books which made them so attractive to a large and faithful company of readers, and he may have been quite right in so thinking; but he did not perceive the risks he ran in abstracting them from their imaginative and literary setting, and exposing them in all the nakedness of their proper name. It is one thing to have 'The Dominion of Dreams' upon your table; and another to be seen handling *The New Pagan Review*; the former might reveal the delicacy of your taste in modern literature, the latter would throw some shadow of suspicion upon the correctness of your morals."

The greatest difficulty which Neo-Paganism has to overcome is still, as Mr. Lewis sees it, the fact that the word "Pagan" continues to stink in the nostrils of Christendom. This, he remarks, is an obstinate reminiscence of those far-past days when the early Church perceived Paganism as among its most powerful and subtle foes, fought it tooth and nail by every device it could lay its mind to, and celebrated the triumph achieved on Golgotha with the ringing cry, "Great Pan is dead!" But Pan, Mr. Lewis asserts,

is not dead; nor, happily, is he ever likely to die. "No deity has a juster claim to live than he; and, could he die, all other deities would perforce become silent and powerless, for the natural is the tap-root of the spiritual." The argument proceeds:

"Doubtless to the early Christians Pan became as one of the devils, perhaps the very Devil. Paganism meant—Saturnalia. There was, of course, a good deal more in Paganism than that! There were Socrates and Aristotle; there were Phidias, Homer, and Pindar; there were Æschylus and Euripides; there was even Archilochus! But to the sheep in the Christian fold, Paganism was the wolf. To the children in the Christian nursery, Paganism was the bogey-man.

"We are not disputing the expediency of this, but showing cause why it comes about that nowadays the word 'Pagan,' in the minds of respectable citizens in a Christian land, usually connotes little more than orgy, libertinism, lawlessness, riot, and all manner of self-indulgent excess. The vision of an over-fed, wine-bibbing Epicurean is allowed to loom so large before the mind as to exclude even a glimpse of the frugal, highly-disciplined Stoic, who was no less a pagan; and neither the sweet-smelling sanity of Walt Whitman, nor the clean, frosty, bracing savor of Nietzsche's doctrine of renunciation as expounded in his 'Will to Power,' makes itself felt, because the nose is altogether occupied with the sensual vagaries of some Oscar Wilde."

The revival of Paganism, if it ever comes—and Mr. Lewis is convinced that it is coming—will not be the restoration of an old cultus. It will not mean the return of Pan. "The Pan of the new Paganism," Mr. Lewis says, "will have suffered change by reason of the exile into which the Church drove him."

"The Church has said, 'Pan or Christ,' and in so saying has rendered impossible the fullness of religious experience to all who accept the antithesis. The ultimate achievements of Life can never be formulated as a disjunction. The irresistible tendency of Life is toward synthesis. 'Either-Or' may occur in the mid-course of some vital process, but no living movement ever rested in an 'Either-Or.' Why 'Pan or Christ'? Why not 'Pan and Christ'? Not as a compromise for the sake of peace, nor as two coordinate principles sharing the throne together, but

as a true synthesis in which all that is divine in human life and all that is human in divine life shall find due place."

The Church supervened upon the Old Paganism as a discipline. That, Mr. Lewis points out, is the significance of the Church in respect of the practice of life—it represents a discipline, an obedience. But discipline, Mr. Lewis insists, is not an end in itself; its worth is vindicated only in the issue of a freer life.

"The purpose of discipline is not to quench but to centralize the spirit of youth with a view to its reentry and revival. The value of restraint is that, when its lesson has been learned, the quests of Youth may be sought and won with greater boldness, steadier resolve, and a more single will. Control derives all its importance from the straightness and constancy it imparts to life. There is no real advantage in virtue if it chills and diminishes passion. Mistakes matter little. Correctness is a mean thing. Excess, which is the vice of the weak, is the virtue of the strong, and (as Blake said) for him the highway of wisdom. The great sin is, not to live with enthusiasm and power when one is ready and the opportunity is at hand. The great untruth is to be unreal. The great treachery is to refuse expression to a Self which is, at last, concentrated and free. Personal discipline is a means to the renewal of youth.

"The renaissance of Youth! Oh, the dreary length of the days in which we go to school with the Law—the old dame with her cupboard full of pains and penalties! Oh, the bitterness of the continual repression of desire, the galling of the bands, the chafing of the fetters! Oh, the heavy stupidity of authority—how it makes us fume and fret! Oh, the monotony of the path with its trim hedges, and the everlasting warning to trespassers wherever to our furtive eye there comes a glimpse of a wider, wilder world which promises the chance of risk and adventure! But, patience, my heart, patience a little while. Something meanwhile is growing deep and strong within thee. This is thy true freedom, and at such a cost has it to be purchased. One day, when at last thou art able to bear thy freedom, thou shalt awake to a world in which thou mayest roam in every wood, loiter in every glade, drink of every stream, follow what path thy desire prompts thee to, and, without hurt or peril, all things shall be thine, richly to enjoy."